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A
GLANCE
AT THE
HISTORY
OF
CHRISTIANITY,
AND OF
ENGLISH
NONCONFORMITY.

BY J. BICHENO, M. A.

SECOND EDITION.

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I am rather at a loss what to say about the publication of the following pages. I dislike apologies on such occasions, and, yet, I am not sure but that some are necessary.

The following thoughts were delivered on Friday last, (three or four short sentences and the notes excepted) at the setting apart of Mr. John Holloway to the pastoral office, over a congregation of protestant dissenters, at Reading. The interlocutory part is omitted.

I publish, more to shew respect to my friends, than to gratify private inclination; and submit to their opinions rather than my own convictions.

In answer to my objections, some have said, "Though it is but a glance, yet it may be useful, and it is sometimes pleasant to travel post through a country we have before explored."—And others urged its brevity as a principal recommendation. "Many of us" said they, "have not money to buy large books; and most of us, less time to read them: at any rate it may be useful to our young people, and serve to stir up attention to a subject which, though of no small importance for christians to be well acquainted with, yet, of late, has been too much neglected. "It may excite to the reading of more elaborate productions."

To afford help to any, and to contribute one argument, or to awaken one idea, which may lead the attention of christians to those enquiries with which the peace and prosperity of Christ's kingdom are so nearly connected; especially the attention of our children, whom we are concerned to see, first sincere christians, and, next to that, enlightened, conscientious dissenters, would yield to my heart the purest pleasure.

That my Friends may not be mistaken in their expectations; and that the rising generation may imitate the virtues of their ancestors, whose memory is sweet in all our churches, is the ardent prayer of

J. BICHENO.

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A GLANCE.

WHEN the passover was instituted, and commanded to be observed for an ordinance to the people of Israel, and to their sons, for ever, the injunction of Moses was, *And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.**

The excellence of every religious observance is, that it hath the authority of God, and can be traced up to his appointment; and every christian ought to be able to give a reason, grounded on God's word, for all his religious services. Do the young people of this assembly, or, do any, who are strangers to our practices, enquire, *What mean ye by this service?* Why do you dissent from the religious establishment of the country in which you live: and, in the ordination of your ministers, follow a practice so different from that which generally prevails? Be assured we do not do it on slight and trifling grounds, and for the sake of separation. I hope we are able to give good reasons for our conduct, and to justify ourselves against the charge of schism, from the laws and testimonies of Jesus Christ, the example of the first Christians, and of the best of men in succeeding generations.†

* Ex. xii. 26, 27.

† Toogood's letters p. 87—90.

We cannot now enter, at large, into these enquiries, nor descend to particulars ; but must confine ourselves to a few cursory hints, relative to the origin of our dissenting churches, and the reasons for our order.—A glance at the history of christianity is necessary.

Our blessed Lord having died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, said to his disciples, just before his ascension to the right hand of his Father, *All power is given unto me in heaven, and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.** And the Apostle Paul declares, respecting him, that *The Father of Glory hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.†*

In the church of Christ there is no other sovereign, or lawgiver, but himself. To him, in all matters of religion and conscience, are his disciples subject, and to him, at his second coming, must all give an account. This should deeply impress, and affect, every christian's mind.—Jesus Christ is sovereign in his church, and in all spiritual concerns. None share with him, either in his legislative or his judicial authority, and at his bar must *I* stand, to answer for my conduct as a subject of his kingdom!

But, is Jesus Christ a king; and did he again and again, assert his supreme and sole authority over his church? that his disciples, by misunderstanding the nature of his kingdom, might not be led into fatal mistakes, he, before his departure from the earth, dropped some important hints for the regulation of their conduct. *My kingdom, said he, is not of this world.—Render unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the thing which are God's.—All that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

* Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

† Eph. i: 22.

‡ John xviii. 36. Matt. xxii. 21. xxvi. 52.

The Apostles thoroughly understood their master, and taught and practised accordingly. In civil matters, they taught submission to the civil magistrate, and enjoined christians to *render unto all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.** With forms of government, and political affairs, they did not, as the apostles of Christ, at all intermeddle. This was no part of their special mission; but all these things were left to the will and wisdom of men; only teaching them to *owe no man any thing but to love one another,†* and to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.‡* But in all things, pertaining to religion and conscience, they professed, and taught, and practised, independence on all but God, and their language was, *We ought to obey God rather than men.§* Whatever the pleasure of the emperors, and governors, or other magistrates might be, and whatever the laws, and customs or established religions of the countries, in which they resided, or sojourned; or whatever hazards they might run, whatever losses sustain, and sufferings endure, they still adhered to that great principle of liberty which they had learned from Christ, *Call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ.||*

Happy would it have been if all that have assumed the christian name had trod in their steps, and remembered that the kingdom of Christ *is not of this world,* and that the subjects of it should be actuated by a very different spirit from that which influences the *princes of the gentiles.*** But the mystery of iniquity soon began to work. The Apostle Paul complained of it in

* Rom. xiii. 7. † xiii. 8. ‡ Eph. iv. 1—3.

§ Acts v. 29.

|| Matt. xxiii. 9, 10.

** xx. 35.

his days; but *the man of sin* was not yet revealed in perfection, nor till some ages afterward.* In the first ages of christianity, all the churches of Christ were independent, and each one chose its own pastor or bishop, and officers, and regulated its own concerns; owning no authority in spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs, but that of Jesus Christ. Their union was only a union of principles, and love; not of worldly policy, or magisterial coercion. The truth of this all history attests.† In those days no one minister pretended to more authority than another. Christ was their master and all they were brethren.

But early in the *fourth* century, when the roman emperors became christians, or professed to be so, and the church enjoyed the smiles of the court; and peace, and riches, and honours, followed, then its original simplicity and liberty soon vanished, and gave place to pride, ambition, unprofitable ceremonies and vain pomp—in a word, to conformity to the world and pagan superstitions. To facilitate the conversion of the heathen nations, and to make the new yoke, imposed by the emperors, sit as easy as imposition would allow, christianity was assimilated, as much as possible, to their

* 2 Thess. ii. 3—12.

† Mosheim, (though he endeavours to apologize for modern innovations) says, “In those early times every christian church consisted of the *people*, their *leaders*, and the *ministers* and *deacons*—The people were undoubtedly the first in authority; for the apostles shewed, by their own example, that nothing of moment was to be carried on, or determined, without the consent of the assembly (Acts i. 15. vi. 3. xv. 4. xxi. 22.) and such a method was both prudent and necessary in those early times.

“It was therefore the assembly of the people which chose their own rulers and teachers, or received them, by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. The same people rejected or confirmed, by their suffrages, the laws, that were proposed, by their rulers to the assembly.” Vol. i. p. 80. 8vo. ed. 1774. See also p. 145.

Dupin, (a catholic) speaking of the three first centuries, says of the christians of those times, “They were very careful to chuse ministers whose life and manners were blameless. After the death of those who were appointed by the apostles, the people chose them.” Vol. ii. p. 73. 12mo. dd. 1716.

pagan prejudices; and we have seen what a christianity they fabricated; and the bloody page of history informs us what sort of christians the nations have been.*

The bishops or pastors, were preferred according to the dignity of the cities in which they resided, and hence the bishops of Rome and Constantinople (which was now become an imperial residence and the rival of Rome) had a long and violent contention for pre-eminence.† The bishop of Rome prevailed, especially in these western parts, and rose from one degree of power and authority to another, till he assumed universal dominion in church and state; and became (after the dissolution of the western empire, the fall of the Roman Cæsars in 476, and the after reduction of Italy to a province) that man of sin, foretold by the apostle Paul, that sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is a god;‡ for now he that had “let,” and retarded, his rise, was “taken out of the way.”§

Now tyranny and corruption, idolatry and superstition universally prevailed, and all the kingdoms of Europe, which the barbarous nations had erected on the ruins of the western empire, gave their power to the beast.|| Bloody laws were enacted to suppress all freedom of enquiry and liberty of worship.** Monks

* Mosheim vol. i. p. 277, 289, 311, 319. See note (a) at the end of these pages.

† Dupin vol. ii. p. 163. Mosheim vol. i. p. 288. 370. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 3-12. § Puffendorf intro. vol. i. p. 404. Mosheim vol. i. p. 243. 286. || Rev. xvii. 13.

** Justinian Code. Justinian in the beginning of his reign (A. D. 529) published an edict concerning his faith, and made it even banishment from the roman territory for any to dare to dissent from it. This faith was acknowledged by the pope to be *the only true faith*. This law, in its pains and penalties, has been the model of later *Acts of Uniformity* and *Test laws*, “All, whether Jews, Gentiles, or Christians, who did not, within three months, embrace and profess the catholic faith, were declared infamous, and as such, excluded from all employments, civil and military; rendered incapable of leaving any thing by will, and their estates confiscated, whether real or personal.” Bower’s *lives of the Popes*, vol. ii. p. 442. *Illustrat. of Proph.* vol. ii. p. 369.

overran the earth, and superstition extended itself on every side. Religion lay expiring, under a motley and enormous heap of superstitious inventions, and had neither the courage, nor the force, to raise her head, or to display her native charms, to a darkened and deduced world——The christians of the seventh century, more than those that went before them, multiplied the objects of their devotion, and paid divine homage to the pretended remains of the cross, to the images of the saints, and to dead mens bones; and in the year 787 idolatry was firmly established by the solemn decree of the second council of Nice.*

The business of professing christians was now, not to search the scriptures, and walk according to this rule, but to send to Rome to learn the mind of the pope, and his conclave, and to obey the bulls and edicts of this man of sin, that had set himself up for the vicar of Christ, and the vicegerent of God. Black darkness succeeded, and, for some centuries, we scarcely discern a ray of light.† The priests were every thing, and the people nothing. All freedom of enquiry and all liberty of worship and of church government, were lost; and the church, which bore the name of Christ, was become a deformed and ravenous monster.‡ But God did not leave himself without witnesses. Here and there, there were a few who did not worship the beast; particularly the Vaudois in the vallies of Piedmont.§ But these could hardly be called a visible church. They were hid. The temple was shut,

* Dupin vol. ii. p. 309—311. Mosheim vol. ii. p. 20. 93.

It was in the eighth century that the bishops of Rome were exalted, by the kings of France, to the rank of temporal princes. France set them up; France all along, has been their principal champion; and France has pulled them down!!!

† “Ignorance, vice and irregularity prevailed in the greater part of the world. It is true, there have been disorders in all ages; but it cannot be said with any shew of truth, that they were equal to those of the tenth century—that they spread so far or were so universal.” Dupin vol. iii. p. 55.

‡ Rev. xiii. 1—10.

§ Mosheim vol. ii, p. 452.

(Rev. xi. 1. 2. 19. xv. 5.) and the gentiles, the spurious christians, possessed the outward court, and none could enter the temple of God but by stealth.

But in the darkest ages there were a few to bear witness for the truth, and to die for Christ; and in the twelfth century the light began to increase, though but slowly. Now the Waldenses and Albigenes, in the south of France and the north of Italy, began to spread that light, which the enemies of Christ could never extinguish, although they slaughtered a million of its propagators.*

In the fourteenth century Wickliff rekindled the light of the Gospel in England. He translated the Bible into English; he denied the pope's supremacy; he condemned episcopacy as being a creature set up by princes; he was for having ministers maintained by the voluntary subscriptions of the people, and not by tythes; and was against *imposing* prescribed forms of prayer.†

* Mosheim vol. ii. p. 451-455. vol. iii. p. 196, 272. Dupin vol. iii. p. 112, 113, 139-141, 189-195. vol. iv. p. 58-60.

† Mosheim vol. iii. p. 166-168. Neal's hist. Pu. vol. i. p. 2-4. Crosbey's hist. Bapt. vol. i. p. 2-13.

It should be also observed that this bright and morning star of the Reformation, not only denied the pope's supremacy, but was against *any person's* assuming the title and authority of being the head of the church, asserting that it is blasphemy to call any *head of the church*, but JESUS CHRIST; and that in the sacrament of orders (as then called) there ought to be only two degrees, *presbyters* or *bishops*, and *deacons*.

I might, perhaps, be thought to have given too partial an account of the opinions maintained by this eminent reformer; if I were to omit what has induced some to conclude that, in the latter part of his life, at least, he opposed infant baptism, and on account of which he has been esteemed, by some as the Father of the *english* Baptists.—*Thomas Waldensis*, who reckons the errors of Wickliff to have been eighty, puts down his denial of infant baptism as one (De Bapt. Sac. Tr. 5. chap. 3.) and on this account calls him one of the seven heads which came out of the bottomless pit, and says "That he" (Wickliff) "doth positively assert that children are not to be sacramentally baptized." *Joseph Vivescombes* reckons Wickliff among those who opposed infant baptism (De Rit. Bapt. lib. ii. chap. 1.) According to Crosbey he taught what struck at the root of *popish* infant baptism, and what indeed led many of his admirers, both in England and Germany, to renounce the

In the fifteenth century John Huss and Jerome of Prague, boldly attacked the vices of the clergy, and bravely withstood the corruptions of Rome, and even recommended in an open and public manner, the writings and opinions of Wickliff*.

In the following age, what is called the *great reformation* broke forth, and many countries of Europe separated themselves from the communion of Rome. But, alas! this was partial and very defective; such as might have been expected from the darkness of the times, and from the imperfections, the situations, the passions and interests of the principal actors in it. Those with whom the power lay, were arbitrary princes, and dignified churchmen; men brought up in darkness and tyranny, and whose eyes were not able, at once, to bear the full light. Our Henry the VIII. by whom the Reformation was begun in this country, was governed by no principle of religion; it was in resentment that he threw off the supremacy of the pope, and assumed it himself. This presumption created some surprise, and the clergy, especially, were startled at the idea of a layman's pretending to be the head of the Church, yet nevertheless, both the convocation and parliament, in the year 1534, declared him to be the sole and supreme head of the *church of England, next and immediately under Christ*; and the power, which the pope had formerly exercised, over the clergy and people of England, was transferred to the king†.

In the next reign (Ed. VI.) the Reformation advanced baptism of infants altogether. He taught "That wise men leave that as impertinent which is not *plainly* expressed in scripture"—"That those are fools and presumptuous which affirm such infants not to be saved, which die without baptism." And he denied "That all sins are abolished in baptism; that baptism does not confer but only signifies grace, which was given before." Fuller's church hist. p. 301—133. A Wald. Art. 35. Crosbey's hist. Bapt. vol. i. p. 8—13. Mosheim vol. iii. p. 166—168. Burnet's hist. Reform vol. i. p. 23, 110. Neal's hist. Pu. vol. i. p. 2—4.

* Mosh. vol. iii. p. 230. † Burnet's hist. Reform vol. i. 136—144. Neal's hist. Pu. vol. i. p. 7, 8. Toogood's letters p. 29.

ced: but the sole authority of Christ in his Church, and the rights of conscience, were never acknowledged, but the contrary supported by the canons and articles of the church, and by acts of parliament. Some, indeed contended for these, and for farther reformation from popery, but all they met with was contempt and persecution—In Elizabeth's reign these were called *puritans*, and in later times they have been denominated *Nonconformists* and *Dissenters*.*

The first presbyterian church, in England, was erected at Wandsworth, near London, in the year 1572.†

The first independent, or congregational Church, in this country, was formed in London in 1616, of which Mr. Henry Jacob was chosen pastor.‡ Some of this Church being convinced that baptism was not to be administered to infants, but to such only as professed faith in Christ, desired to be dismissed, and to be allowed to form a distinct congregation. The Church agreeing to allow them this liberty, they parted in a friendly manner, and, on Sept. 12, 1633, laid the foundation of the first Baptist Church in England, having Mr. John Spilsbury for their pastor.§—At the present time there are, of the three denominations, in England, about 1500 churches, of which about 400 are of the Baptist denomination.

Cruel and bloody statutes have been enacted against the advocates for farther reformation and for the right of private judgment. Uniformity has been insisted on, and many of our ancestors have suffered and died for

* Though the early Puritans were for a much greater reformation from popery than the court approved, and maintained the holy scriptures to be a standard of *discipline*, as well as *doctrine*, yet, it must be acknowledged they were, most of them, for uniformity in their own way, and but few indeed, in that dawn of light, perceived the right of private judgment, nor was it ever acknowledged by *any body of men*, in this country, till the rise of our Independent and Baptist Churches; nor did even these advocates for toleration and the rights of conscience extend their views, at first, quite commensurate with the liberty of the Gospel.—The evidence of these rights has been as the morning light *which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. Neal vol. i. p. 96. vol. ii. p. 207, 212. † vol. i. 202. ‡ p. 476 § Crolbey vol. i. p. 147--149.

a good conscience.* In the days of Charles II. (A. D. 1662) *two thousand* godly ministers, who could not subscribe to every word in the Prayer Book, and bend their consciences to the tyranny of the times, were cast out of the church, and forced into dissent; one from this town (Reading) Mr. Christ. Fowler, vicar of St. Mary's; and more than 20 through this county. The lot of these 2000 worthies was, that they and their followers were persecuted by statute after statute, till thousands of the worthiest families in the kingdom were reduced to beggary and ruin.†

The principal reasons for the nonconformity of these christian worthies, and of the dissenters of the present times, may be reduced to seven. 1. The frame and constitution of the established church, it being national. 2. The officers of it; many of whom the scriptures know nothing.‡ 3. The mode of worship. 4. The ceremonies. 5. The terms of admission to membership, and to the ministry. 6. The choice of ministers; they being most of them imposed by strangers. Out of 9,284 parish churches 3845 are lay fees. 7. The discipline of the church. There are indeed, in the present day, two or three other reasons, which, although they are not general, are sometimes the occasions of dissent, particularly among our respectable friends the methodists, viz. the heterodoxy, or inattention, of some of the established clergy, and the immorality of others §

* In the year 1559 an act was passed, entitled "*An act for the uniformity of Common Prayer, and service in the church, and administration of the sacraments.*" This statute, which has been the occasion of so much calamity to conscientious dissenters; as well as a snare to many conformists; may be seen at the beginning of every Common Prayer Book.

† Neal voll. ii. p. 624, 632—636. Palmer's introd. to Noncon. Mem. p. 31—34. Burnet's hist. of his own Times vol. i. p. 279.

‡ There are in England, 2 Archbishops; 25 Bishops; 26 Deaneries; 60 Arch-deaconries; 554 Dignities and Prebends, besides 9284 Rectories, Vicarages, etc., etc., etc.

§ Palmer p. 37—59. Neal vol. ii. p. 663. De Laune's plea for the Noncon. Toogood's letters. The *seven reasons* above, do not apply equally to all the dissenters of those times; especially the first; but they were certainly the predominant ones; and are the reasons which

The consequences of the *act for the uniformity of common prayers* in 1662, by which so many godly men were cast out of the church, and of the other laws against dissenters, were dreadful to thousands of the most upright men. According to the best computation, the dissenters suffered from fines, and in other ways, in the short space of three years only, the loss of two millions of property; Mr. Jeremy White collected the *names* of 60,000 persons who suffered, on a religious account, between the years 1660 and 1689, the period of the glorious revolution; 5000 of whom died in prison. But such was the fury of their enemies that about 8000 perished in the whole.* By that revolution, never to be forgotten, and the toleration which followed, the dissenters were delivered from the cruel persecutions which had afflicted them for so long a time; and since which, a degree of religious liberty has been enjoyed, before unknown in this country: and our fathers have proved that, in their dissent, they were actuated only by a good conscience; and I hope, and believe, that their children will always prove, by their reverence for the laws, and respect to lawful authority, that it is not from a disloyal spirit, and in contempt of the civil power, or from impatience of restraint, that they dissent from the national establishment, and exercise a right by which no one *can* be injured, though bigots may be offended, but because they are persuaded that conscience, and all things, purely of a religious nature, are subject to no jurisdiction but that of God; and that, in these matters, above all others, we are *to obey God rather than men*;

influence nine tenths of the dissenters of the present day, who know any thing of their principles——A learned prelate in his charge to his clergy, soon after the Birmingham riots in 1792, exclaimed against a certain class of dissenters, on account of their objection to *all* religious establishments. This objection is more general than his lordship supposes; but the conclusion ought to be the direct opposite of that which his fears have suggested. The prevalence of this sentiment, most certainly makes modern dissenters less dangerous to episcopacy, than the old presbyterians, who were zealous for the establishment of their own system. They who with ill to a religious sect, may wish its establishment. It may flourish for awhile, and look fair, but, it contains in its vitals the principles of corruption, and death. * Neal v. n p. 757-760

on pain of his awful displeasure.

O that the church of Christ had been as happy in all other countries, as, for this last century, it has been in this! But, alas! the period of our release was the beginning of new sorrows to our brethren in most of the neighbouring countries*. We cannot recollect their sufferings without anguish! The wild beasts of the forest have laid waste that beautiful vine that had taken deep root in many of the most populous countries of Europe! Tens of thousands—we might say hundreds of thousands—have suffered and bled, in France, in Germany, in Savoy, in Piedmont, and in other countries; and all that we have been able to do, has been to weep over their sufferings, and cry, *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge, and avenge the blood of thy servants, on them that dwell on the earth!*†

Yes, God will hear the cry of his people, and the groans of his Israel in Egypt, and remember his covenant!——“*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye need not that I should say any thing; for ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord's vengeance, on these enemies of his church, so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say peace, and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.—WATCH!—again I say unto you, WATCH!—the night is far spent; the day is at hand*†.

My brethren, you have heard what sort of a kingdom Christ is, and what the principles and conduct of the first christians were. We have hastily traced the corruptions of christianity; the progress of the grand apostacy, and of the reformation. This reformation originated from christians assuming the right of

* Mosheim vol. iv. p. 484---489. † Rev. vi. 10.

† 1 Thess. v. 1---3. Rom. xiii. 12. Dan. vii. 23---26. Rev. xi. 3. 17---19. xii. xiii. 5---10. xvi---xix.—Christians! we live in awful times! awake, and give yourselves unto prayer—*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.* Luke xii. 35, 36.

searching the scriptures, and of judging for themselves, as to the mind of Christ taught in them. We claim the same right, and being persuaded that it is the bounden duty, of every christian, to conform to the mind of Christ, the directions of the New Testament, without regard to general practice, or human laws, we aim at as near a conformity to the perfect pattern which our Lord and his Apostles have given us, as we possibly can, and are therefore obliged to dissent from many of our fellow christians, whom we nevertheless love and honour; and, espescially from national establishments because we think that, in them, an authority is assumed, at once injurious to the authority of Jesus Christ, and subversive of christian liberty; and in many respects, doctrines and ceremonies are imposed and an order of things enforced, which, we judge to be by no means consistent with the New Testament.

What do we learn from the New Testament respecting a Gospel church? We certainly read of no *national* churches, made up of the *mass* of the people. They were made up of a *separated, peculiar* people*. They were *voluntary* societies, formed by mutual agreement. Hence we read, *And all the believers were together—with one accord*—they had *one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism*; and were *all made to drink into one spirit*. We read of all the churches of the saints; of the churches of Judea; of the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and of the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; all of which were voluntary societies of persons believing in Christ, and associating for their mutual convenience and edification.†

These churches were distinguished from the civil societies of the world, by their *spiritual nature, end, and*

* See the 19th Art. of the church of England, "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered," etc.

† Acts ii. 1: Eph. iv. 4, 5: 1 Cor. xii. 13: xiv. 33. Gal. i. 22. Acts ix. 31. Rom. xvi. 5. Col. iv. 15:

‡ See the venerable Mr. Turner's *Compendium of Social Religion*,

design. The professed design of the members, was to come out from among the wicked, and be separate; not to be conformed to the world, but transformed; a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The business, and privileges of these churches, were all of a spiritual nature. And whilst the business of civil society relates only to the *temporal* concerns of men; that of the churches of Christ, has respect only, to their *spiritual* concerns. The kingdom of Christ is neither opposed to, nor in connection with, the kingdoms of the world; but is opposed to the kingdom of darkness, the moral pollutions and wickedness of men, and the power of him that worketh in the children of disobedience. All that the civil magistrate has to do here, is to protect men in the peaceable exercise of their rights.

The chief ends of church fellowship, are the preservation of the faith, purity and worship of the Gospel; the enjoyment and support of religious ordinances, according to the appointment of Christ, for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of believers.

Hence the utility of a gospel ministry. *He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ.**

But no man has a right to impose these pastors and teachers. They are to be freely chosen by the people, who are the sole judges of their qualifications, and of their abilities for their own particular edification. This right the churches of Christ, universally exercised for some ages, till antichrist got a head, and the civil magistrate obtruded his authority, and thus the church became enslaved, debased and prostituted. Hence, even when an Apostle was to be ordained, in the place of Judas, the disciples were assembled (*the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty*) and gave forth their lots.† In Acts xiv. 23. we read, *When they (Barnabas and Saul) had ordained them elders in*

chap 2: A book that I could wish to be in the hands of every christian.

* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

† Acts i. 15-26.

*every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commend-
ed them to the Lord.* ORDAINED: that is, appoint-
ed with the suffrage, or lifting up of the hands, of
the people. The commission of Barnabas and Saul
was extraordinary, and therefore we may suppose
them to have exercised some extraordinary powers;
but still the word implies the *choice*, or *consent*
of the people. This is agreeable to Acts vi. 3, 5, 6.
*Brethren look ye out from among you seven men of ho-
nest report—And the saying pleased the multitude, and
they chose Stephen and Philip &c. whom they set be-
fore the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid
their hands on them.* That this right of choosing their
own pastors and officers, and of regulating their own
affairs, was exercised by all the churches of Christ, in
the first ages, is placed beyond all controversy; for
though many apologies have been invented for exist-
ing innovations, yet profane, as well as sacred, history,
is so clear, on this head, that scarcely any doubt it.*
And what right of more importance? Let us therefore
*stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made
us free.†* And *I beseech you also, that ye receive not
the grace of God in vain.‡*

* It was by Justinian's laws (about the year 534) that the inferior
people were wholly excluded from their right of suffrage in the choice
of their bishops, etc. and the election confined to the *Optimates*, or per-
sons of higher rank and quality. Justin. Novel. 123, c. 1. Bing-
ham's Antiq. of the Christian Church, vol. ii. p. 213:

† Gal. v. 1.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

See page 7.

(a) IF we would see what has been done to assimilate Christi-
anity to heathenism we must take a view of the old pagan super-
stitions, and compare them with those of the corrupted churches.
The roman emperor was the *Pontifex Maximus*, or *high priest*; and,
as the head of the pagan church in the roman empire, had divine
honors and oblations paid to him; thus, though Jesus Christ is the only
head, the only King and High Priest, whom the Father hath set
over his church, yet a share in these honors has been usurped by others.

And had the heathens, beside their supreme Jupiter, divers inferior
deities, gods and goddesses, to whom they erected altars and statues, and
dedicated temples, days and feasts; and who were supposed to be the
peculiar patrons of certain countries, cities, and orders of men? so the

(18)
corrupted christians have had gods and goddesses many, and lords many. *St. George*, for England; *St. Denis*, for France; *St. Mark*, for Venice; *St. Nicolas*, for the mariner; *St. Windoline*, for the shepherd; *St. Magdalen*, for the courtesan, etc. Did the heathen idolaters build their temples east and west, consecrating, with many prayers and ceremonies, first the ground, and then the temple; worshiping towards the east, with many antic postures and gestures? Had they their *asperges*, sprinkling themselves at the temple door; their processions, shrines, incense, tapers; and music, vocal and instrumental? So the apostate followers of *Jésus* have turned the simple worship of the gospel into a pantomime; and in the place of that worship of God *in spirit and in truth*, which the Saviour taught, they have substituted the vanities of heathenism.

And, as among idolaters, they had their superior and inferior priests, so these christians. The pagans had their *Flamins* and *Arch-flamins*, for sacerdotal service, in their provinces and dioceses; and inferior priests, distinguished by dignified names, tonsures, orders, and habits. The dignified priests were those that attended on the capital temples, as the proper priests of Jupiter, Apollo, etc. while the more inferior priests had the care of the sacred celebrations. In imitation of these the debauched christian church began now to have her bishops and arch-bishops for sacerdotal service, in the provinces and dioceses of the roman empire; and inferior clergy, distinguished, too, by dignified names, tonsures, orders, and habits. The dignified clergy were those that attended the capital, or cathedral churches, as Deans, Chapters, Prebends and Archdeacons; and the more inferior priests (as the *teachers* now affected to call themselves) had the care of the sacred celebrations in the *Cure* or *Parishes*. The heathen priests had their proper habits, and particular vestments, for their religious service, as the *albes*, *tunicles* and *amicti*; so now the christian priests assumed particular habits for their ministrations, and to distinguish their orders, as surplices, or albes, chasubles, or tunicles, etc. etc.

The heathens had their religious festivals, in honor of their gods, in commemoration of the building their temples, etc. and as these, most certainly, could not be altogether given up, the matter has been compromised. For their *Saturnalia*, which they were used to celebrate in December, with riot and debauchery, adorning their temples and houses with green boughs, they have had their christmas sports; for their *Floralia*, on Mayday, when their young people, of both sexes, with great jollity, scattered boughs and flowers and danced about may-poles; they have had the feast of Philip and Jacob, celebrated in the same way; for the loss of their *Palia*, or Shepherd's feast, on Midsummer-day they have been compensated by a revel, in honor of John the Baptist; and for their *Panathenia*, a feast to all their gods, they have enjoyed the feast of All-saints; and so of the rest. See De Laune's *Image of the Beast*.

All this pride, and folly, and idleness, has been called "Our holy religion!!!" and many, having mistaken it for genuine Christianity, have thus been the easy prey of infidelity;—but, we have not so learnt to know Christ.

